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BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0509
FRED COOPER/NEW YORK

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NEW YORK POLITICAL PROFILE

ANNCR:

NEW YORK STATE WILL HOLD ITS PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTION TUESDAY. MAJOR INTEREST IS ON THE DEMOCRATIC RACE WHERE TWO HUNDRED SIX DELEGATES TO THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING CONVENTION ARE AT STAKE. HERE WITH A LOOK AT NEW YORK POLITICS IS VOA'S FRED COOPER.

VOICE:

MORE THAN HALF OF THE REGISTERED VOTERS IN NEW YORK STATE ARE DEMOCRATS AND THEY ARE GENERALLY CONCENTRATED IN THE STATE'S LARGE METROPOLITAN AREAS. BUT WINNING A MAJORITY OF DEMOCRATIC VOTES MEANS PUTTING TOGETHER A COMPLEX COALITION OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS, LABOR UNION MEMBERS, CITY DWELLERS AND SUBURBANITES.

NEW YORK IS CONSIDERED A POLITICALLY-LIBERAL, URBAN INDUSTRIAL STATE. AS FAR AS DEMOCRATIC PARTY POLITICS ARE CONCERNED THIS IS A FAIRLY TRUE PICTURE. BUT NEW YORK ALSO BOASTS LARGE FARMING AREAS AND -- SURPRISINGLY TO MANY PEOPLE -- A MAJORITY OF NEW YORK VOTERS SURVEYED IN A RECENT POLL CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE POLITICAL MODERATES OR CONSERVATIVES. IN THE LAST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, FIFTY-NINE PERCENT OF THE STATE'S VOTE WENT TO FORMER PRESIDENT NIXON, FORTY-ONE PERCENT TO THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE, SENATOR GEORGE MCGOVERN.

STILL, NEW YORK IS FAMOUS FOR ITS PIONEERING SOCIAL PROGRAMS. AND A MAJORITY OF NEW YORK STATEWIDE OFFICE-HOLDERS COME FROM THE LIBERAL WINGS OF THEIR PARTIES, BE THEY DEMOCRAT OR REPUBLICAN.

THE DOMINANT IMAGE OF NEW YORK IS THAT OF A MIXTURE OF VARIOUS ETHNIC GROUPS. THE LARGEST ARE BLACKS, ITALIANS, GERMANS, POLES, RUSSIANS, IRISH AND PUERTO RICANS. THIRTY-FIVE PERCENT OF NEW YORKERS ARE CATHOLIC AND FOURTEEN PERCENT ARE JEWISH. BOTH RELIGIOUS GROUPS HAVE CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND ARE ALMOST ALWAYS REPRESENTED IN STATEWIDE OFFICES.

DESPITE THE WIDE VARIETY OF VOTING BLOCS IN THE STATE, THE MAIN ISSUES THAT CONCERN PRACTICALLY ALL VOTERS THIS YEAR ARE ECONOMIC ONES -- THE FINANCIAL TROUBLES OF NEW YORK CITY AND STATE, UNEMPLOYMENT, INFLATION AND TAXES.

IN THE PAST, MOST STATEWIDE CANDIDATES HAD TO DEAL WITH THE DIFFERING INTERESTS OF DOWNSTATE NEW YORKERS -- THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION -- WHO LIVE IN THE NEW YORK CITY AREA, AND UPSTATE NEW YORKERS -- WHO LIVE IN THE SMALLER TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS. BUT THE STATE'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ARE, UNFORTUNATELY, WIDESPREAD ENOUGH TO DEVELOP A COMMUNITY OF INTEREST ON MANY ISSUES.

POLITICAL ANALYSTS HAVE ALSO NOTED OTHER FACTORS THAT ARE LESSENING THE HISTORIC UPSTATE-DOWNSTATE TENSIONS, INCLUDING A GROWING URBANIZATION OF UPSTATE NEW YORK AND A LESSENING OF THE CONSERVATIVE TREND AMONG VOTERS OUTSIDE NEW YORK CITY.

WITH ITS EIGHTEEN MILLION PEOPLE, NEW YORK IS THE SECOND MOST POPULOUS STATE IN THE NATION AND THE LEADER IN MANUFACTURING AND FINANCE. IT IS ALSO A MAJOR TESTING GROUND FOR POLITICAL CANDIDATES ON THEIR ROAD TO THE PRESIDENCY.

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